DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 650 HE 024 630

AUTHOR	Lopez, Gloria Ann
TITLE	Improvement for Undergraduate Education in Texas: College-Level Competencies.
INSTITUTION	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Austin.
SPONS AGENCY	Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Mar 90
CONTRACT	G008730487-88
NOTE	22p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; College Bound Students; *College Freshmen; *College Preparation; College School Cooperation; Educational Improvement; Higher Education; High Schools; Mathematics Skills; *Minimum Competencies; Reading Skills; Thinking Skills; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*Texas

ABSTRACT

The report describes a 2-year Texas project which identified academic competencies needed by first-year college students in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and critical thinking. Presentations at conferences and educational meetings brought the competencies and their implications to the attention of over 300 Texas educators. Additional project goals were: improved consistency of content in beginning college-level courses; development of guidelines for placing underprepared students into remedial and developmental classes; facilitation of credit transfer from 2-year to 4-year institutions; and increased awareness of needed academic competencies by high-school students, their parents, and counselors. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED332650

Cover Sheet

Grantee Organization:

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
(Formerly Coordinating Board of the Texas College and University System)
P.O. Box 12788, Capitol Station
200 East Riverside
Austin, Texas 78711

Grant No.:

G008730487-88

Project Dates:

Starting Date: September 1, 1987
Ending Date: December 31, 1989
Number of months: 28

Project Director:

Gloria Ann Lopez
Community Colleges and Technical Institutes
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
P. O. Box 12788
200 East Riverside
Austin, Texas 78711
Telephone: (512) 462-6300

FIPSE Program Officer:

Constance Cook

Grant Award:

Year 1	$100,475
Year 2	117,750
No-cost extension	
Total	$218,225

HE 024 630

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Summary Paragraph

In 1987 the Division of Community and Technical Colleges of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board initiated a project to describe academic competencies needed by first-year college students upon which to build for success in post-secondary education. Over 90 educators from high schools, community colleges and senior institutions collaborated to identify and describe those competencies in reading, writing, mathematics and critical thinking. In a series of three conferences devoted to a report on the competencies project and in meetings of other educational groups, over three hundred Texas educators were made aware of the competencies and their implications for teaching and learning.

Name Gloria Ann Lopez, Ph. D.

Address Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Community Colleges and Technical Institutes Division
P. O. Box 12788, Capitol Station
200 East Riverside Drive
Austin, Texas 78711

Telephone (512) 462-6300

Titles of project reports:

1. "Improvement for Undergraduate Instruction in Texas: College-level Competencies"
2. "Regional Resources"
3. "*Proceedings of Conferences on "Improvement for Undergraduate Education in Texas: College-Level Competencies*"
4. "Set Your Mind on College"

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Title: Improvement for Undergraduate Education in Texas: College-Level Competencies

Grantee: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
P.O. Box 12788, Capitol Station
Austin, TX 78711

Project Directors: Mary Griffith, Gloria Ann Lopez, Joan Hassenflu, Fred Allen

Contact: Gloria Ann Lopez, (512) 462-6300

A. Project Overview:

In 1987 the Fund for Improvement of Secondary Education funded the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to manage a state-wide project to define college-level competencies in reading, writing, and mathematics. Over ninety faculty members, curriculum specialists and administrators from community colleges, universities and high schools met several times during 1987-88 to define the competencies in the three areas. In 1988-89 a final report, including the competencies themselves, was compiled, published and disseminated. A series of three conferences was conducted in 1989 to introduce the report, to stimulate thinking about imparting the competencies and to provide workshops demonstrating how implementation will influence instruction.

B. Purpose:

The Instructional Competencies Project was undertaken to develop detailed statements of skills and abilities needed by first-year college students for success in postsecondary studies. Additional goals were to

- promote consistency in reading, writing, and mathematics content in beginning college-level courses
- establish guidelines for placing under prepared students into remedial and developmental classes

- assure consistency in the quality of work and comparability in the level of achievement of students who receive credit for college courses
- facilitate transfer of credits from two-year to four-year institutions
- communicate to high school students, their parents and counselors the academic competencies needed upon enrollment in college-level courses

C. Background and Origins:

In 1986, the Coordinating Board conducted a series of studies to investigate student transition from community colleges to senior institutions. A central question which arose early and persisted throughout this process regarded what actually constituted college-level coursework. Our research revealed that other states were also feeling the need to define postsecondary academic performance. Especially helpful were the reports obtained from Minnesota and New Jersey. Nevertheless, it soon became evident that Texas needed its own state-wide definitions. At about the same time, the Select Committee on Higher Education of the Texas legislature was appointed to study and make recommendations for reforms in higher education. This FIPSE grant was therefore sought within the context of other state-wide efforts.

D. Project Description:

The project began with the appointment of a state-wide steering committee composed of faculty members and administrators from two and four-year institutions. Under the leadership of the committee, eighty other faculty members from colleges, universities and high schools were recruited to contribute to the writing of the competencies.

E. Project Results:

After completing the draft of the report, several conferences were held involving members of the business community, parents, and approximately 300 college and high school faculty members, administrators and curriculum development specialists. Their comments are compiled in *Proceedings of Conferences on "Improvement for Undergraduate Education*

in Texas: College-Level Competencies", which is being distributed with the final report. It contains an evaluative record of small group reports on the competencies and preliminary ideas for integrating them into the teaching and learning process. Participants also attended workshops presented by experienced reading, writing and mathematics consultants presented to give examples and practice in using these skills to teach any subject.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board recognized the significance of this project for improving undergraduate education in Texas. As events of the last two years have occurred, there have been more and more opportunities for integration of this project with other efforts. With the completion and dissemination of the final report, we are prepared to move forward to meaningful implementation. Because this project requires long-range, systemic change, the impact is yet to be determined.

Evaluation at this stage is formative. The final report has been critiqued and/or reviewed at three conferences; remarks are found in Appendix A. The evaluation of a conference is also appended to this report (Appendix B). Statewide reaction is yet to be gauged; however, both acceptance and implementation are the desired end results. Integration of the report into the development of core curriculum at each Texas college and university is also being encouraged.

F. Summary and Conclusions

Thanks to the two-year FIPSE grant, the state of Texas has reached 300 of its educators from different levels and disciplines not limited to reading, writing and mathematics. We are in agreement that consistency in curricular content and student competencies is a key to improving higher education in Texas. We are also in agreement that higher education is not in a position to act alone to redress the problems of higher education in our state. A common theme in the small group reports from the three general conferences was that communication among K-12, community colleges and senior institutions is required for achieving what has been referred to as the seamless web of education.

According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, there have been some sixty studies of education since *A Nation at Risk*. In order that the results of this FIPSE project not become just another study to be shelved and ignored, all participants at the final November conference in Corpus Christi were encouraged to make a presentation in their

institutions on the Instructional Competencies Project. The purpose of those presentations is to continue dissemination of the competencies. Reports of those presentations will be sent to the Coordinating Board and compiled for later publication in its newsletter *Coordinates*.

Final Report
The Texas Instructional Competencies Project
September 1987 to December 1989

A. Project Overview

How the project started

In 1986 a series of studies were conducted to investigate patterns of student migration from community colleges to senior institutions. Of particular relevance to this report was the problem students encountered in transferring credits earned at a community college to either another community college or a senior institution. Common definitions of competencies were needed to be applied across institutions so that progress toward a given program of study made at one college would be accepted by the others. The need to define competencies therefore became very clear and pressing. It also became obvious that the competencies would have to be imparted early in the program of study toward both the associate and the baccalaureate degrees. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board saw itself as the logical agency to oversee a project to provide such definition. It undertook the project in 1987.

Also in 1987, the state legislature mandated a state-wide program of student testing early in the first year of college study. The purpose of the resulting Texas Academic Skills Program was to identify students who did not have the requisite skills to persevere to their bachelor degree. Although strictly speaking it addressed a different question, the legislation underscored the concern felt throughout Texas about the state of undergraduate achievement.

What happened

A plan was conceived whereby the educational community in Texas, especially the higher education community, would be brought together in a series of working meetings to identify academic competencies students need to build on in order to successfully complete a four-year degree. A grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education was applied for and awarded in 1987 which would make it possible to realize the plan.

A full-time project director was hired and began to gather human and other types of resources. Information was obtained from the states of Minnesota and New Jersey describing either their college competencies or testing programs. Educators in Texas and in other parts of the country were identified and approached about working on the FIPSE competencies, and a production schedule was established.

The Coordinating Board received verbal approval of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) Project grant award as the testing bill mandating the development and implementation of an assessment program by Fall 1989 was being passed by the Texas Legislature (HB 2182). To assure that the college-level competency statements to be developed in the FIPSE Project and the test objectives of the assessment instrument were based upon common definitions, a common structure was developed to ensure coordination, consistency, and validity to both the FIPSE college-level comptetencies and the test objectives.

Acting in the capacity of steering committee were select members of the Texas Academic Skills Council (TASC) and additional individuals added to provide specific

expertise and experience. Faculty members serving on the Content Advisory Committees for development of the test objectives served on the FIPSE Content Competency Development Committees to develop the instructional competencies which defined college entry level work. In this, the FIPSE Project instructional competencies were ensured a direct relation to the test objectives, even though their scope was broader than the test.

Who was served

Teachers, curriculum specialists and administrators were made aware of the competencies in draft or final form in a series of presentations. Three were made during conferences devoted specifically to the competencies and two presentations were made to the state's community college presidents and the chief academic officers. The total number of participants was over 300. The presentations of the competencies were made to the following groups:

Group	Location	Date
FIPSE Conference	San Antonio	June 1 & 2, 1989
Chief Instructional Officers	Kerrville	June 20, 1989
Texas Association of Developmental Educators	Dallas	October 19, 1989
FIPSE Conference	Dallas	July 20, 1989
FIPSE Conference	Corpus Christi	November 2 & 3, 1989

Outcomes

In addition to the conferences already mentioned and the 300 of our colleagues reached, Texas' Instructional Competencies Project produced four documents. The first is the report on improvement of undergraduate instruction entitled *Improvement for Undergraduate Instruction in Texas: College-Level Competencies*. This document is accompanied by two other items. The first is entitled *Regional Resources* and is a listing, by higher education regions, of people who served on the Instructional Competencies Task Force, who attended a conference, or both. Its purpose is to enable people with common concerns about college teaching and learning to get in contact with each other for mutual help and encouragement.

The second supporting document is *Proceedings of Conferences on "Improvement for Undergraduate Education in Texas: College-Level Competencies."* It consists of the reactions of small discussion groups as they saw the final report, including the college-level academic competencies, for the first time. Its purpose is to provide readers with an idea of the reactions of their colleagues to the competencies. This enables those not in attendance to measure the degree to which they fit the consensus. A more complete description of how the discussion groups were managed is included in Section D.

The fourth document, "Set Your Mind on College," is a shortened brochure version of the competencies defined. It is designed for high school students, parents, and counselors to create an awareness of the academic competencies needed upon enrollment in college-level courses.

B. Purpose

The problem addressed

Texas, with the rest of the nation, became increasingly aware of serious problems throughout its educational system during the decade of the 1980s. Issues addressed in *A Nation At Risk*, such as falling standardized test scores, low levels of basic academic skills at entry to postsecondary studies and level of education and training of the state's work force, took on a growing sense of urgency. Internal assessments revealed the need to measure skills for college success, college remedial education, and the need for a state-wide system for tracking student progress through

higher education. Also established was the link between education and economic development.

Of more specific concern was the gap between the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), the statewide high school exit test, and what is needed for student success in college. As a step toward establishing that difference and setting standards for college-level basic skills, the state legislature mandated the Texas Academic Skills Program. As realized in 1989, this program includes a test given in the first year of college establishing minimum skills required for postsecondary study.

The problem, however, lies deeper than minimum skills. The FIPSE grant was therefore used in large part to fund a project which would begin exploring options for teaching, learning and student assessment beyond lecture, memorization and paper and pencil tests. The purpose of the College-Level Competencies Project was to describe a wide range of student abilities. That was done in the report *Improvement for Undergraduate Education*. A second purpose was to disseminate to Texas educators the fact that those competencies had been described and to provide them with opportunities to consider the implications for classroom teaching and student assessment. This was accomplished during the conferences already listed, where assessment was seen to include formats not limited to machine-scorable tests. Given that the competencies describe critical thinking and other affective domain activities, it became obvious that the range of evaluation instruments and techniques had to be broadened.

Another problem addressed by this FIPSE grant was consistency of academic abilities of students transferring between and among the 100 publicly-supported institutions of

higher learning in Texas. It is the intent of the Higher Education Coordinating Board that loss of credit arising from the transfer of course work from one institution to another be reduced to a minor procedural inconvenience at worst. It is the intent of the College-Level Competencies Project that a single set of student competencies guide curriculum and instruction throughout the state. This will be accomplished jointly with the work of the Core Curriculum Committee.

Administrative pitfalls to avoid

The College-Level Competencies Project went well administratively. We met our objectives in a timely fashion. The cautionary note to be sounded is that the involvement of high school educators requires much planning and forethought to give them a feeling of purpose in attending the dissemination conferences. High school teachers and curriculum specialists were involved in producing the competencies. They met as members of working committees from the earliest stages and had direct input into the wording of preliminary drafts. The weakness of the link to the high schools appeared during the dissemination stage. As mentioned, there were three state-wide conferences attended by over 300 educators. Of that number roughly ten percent were high school personnel. Their comments, included in "Proceedings" and collected at the end of each conference, indicated that they did not have as clear an idea of why they were in attendance as had been hoped. Secondary education in Texas has a more uniform structure than do the colleges. The high school personnel attending the conferences did not feel that they were there for any other reason than for their information. The

postsecondary educators, for their part, did not understand the curriculum constraints and limited local curriculum flexibility on their secondary school colleagues. The result was a gap that was inadequately bridged.

C. Background and Origins

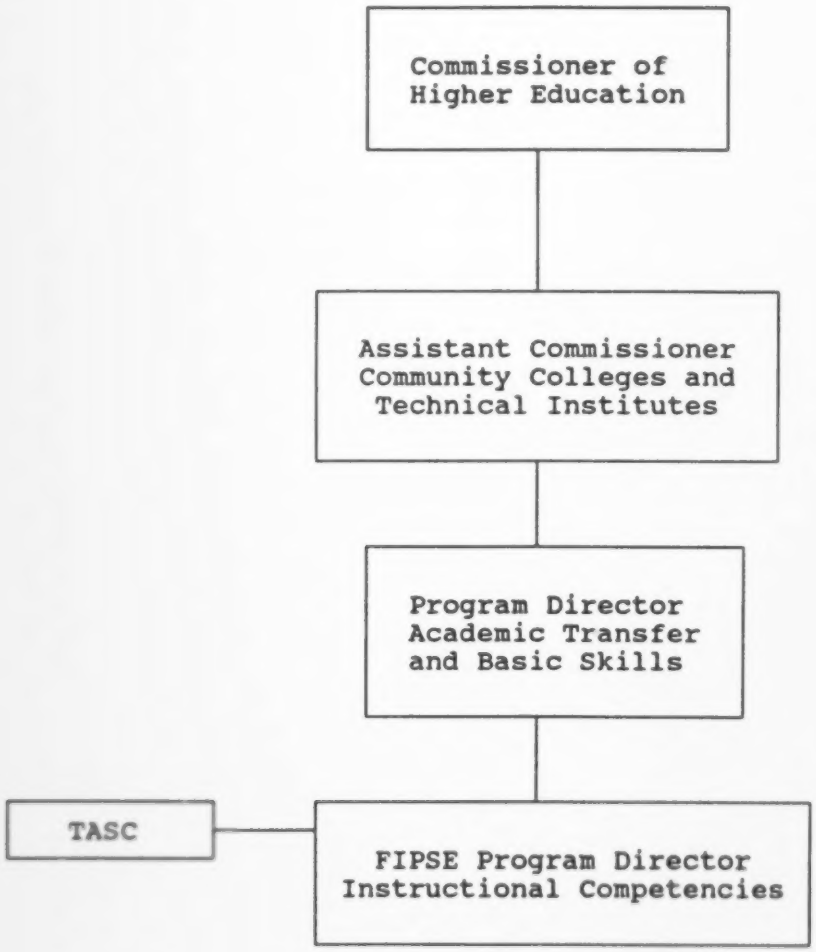
Origins prior to funding.

Early in the decade of the 1980s, a group of educators collaborated in a series of workshops on the academic preparation of students for Texas colleges. These efforts were begun in response to a growing awareness that students' low levels of basic academic skills were threatening to effectively hinder large numbers of them from persisting through a four-year program of college study. These initial efforts indicated that among the causes of low completion rates were substantial differences in the curricula of the more than 100 public and private colleges and universities in Texas. These differences include the number of credits offered at the program level, depth and breadth of subject matter in individual courses, and acceptance of credits at transfer.

Organization

The FIPSE - funded College-Level Competencies Project was administered by the Community Colleges and Technical Institutes Division of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Part of the grant was used to hire one full-time project director, 100 percent of whose time was devoted to the project. There was also one full or part-time secretarial staff person who reported to the project director during the entire length of the grant. A partial

organizational chart of the Higher Education Coordinating Board is presented below.


Commissioner of Higher Education
Assistant Commissioner Community Colleges and Technical Institutes
Program Director Academic Transfer and Basic Skills
TASC
FIPSE Program Director Instructional Competencies

Size and Scope

Because the issues addressed by the College-Level Competencies Project were not limited to any one segment of

the higher education community or even to higher education alone, its size and scope were comprehensive. Every publicly-supported community college, upper division and university in the state was apprised of the project. In the later stages, all of those same institutions were invited to send representatives to the three major conferences introducing the competencies.

In addition, there was more active participation on the part of 30 of the 49 community colleges, and 17 of the 37 upper-division and four-year institutions, which provided personnel to serve on the content committees which composed the first draft of the competencies. In addition five school districts and the Texas Education Agency, in charge of K-12, participated at this early stage.

D. Project Description

Key assumptions and strategies

Assumptions:

There were several assumptions that guided the conception, planning and execution of the FIPSE competencies project:

1. Chief among these assumptions was that the problem was shared by all segments of higher education. As has been noted, the need for uniform college-level competencies arose out of a desire to coordinate student achievement and the methods to evaluate it faced by all the institutions of higher learning in the state. The research already mentioned indicated that student migration happens in all directions. Students transfer among community colleges, among four-year institutions, and from four-year institutions to community colleges. This indicated to the Coordinating

Board that the problem of evaluating and equating student performance was not limited to one type of institution. It was therefore further assumed that, since all were affected, all levels of higher education would welcome and actively participate in working toward a solution.

2. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board was seen as the logical body to supervise such a project. Further, the Division of Community and Technical Colleges was assumed to be the office having the greatest interest in realizing it.

3. The project would be of interest to the schools, especially the high schools. This assumption was made since the high schools devote a good deal of their resources to advising their students on programs of study. That advising includes considering which courses transfer with greatest ease to which colleges and universities.

4. Given the first three assumptions, it was further assumed that, with proper planning and execution, broad-based participation would be forthcoming.

5. Finally it was assumed that with broad-based participation, the college-level competencies project would have a positive impact on student academic success.

Strategies:

1. In order to ensure that the assumed broad-based participation would indeed be forthcoming, all levels of higher education as well as the high schools were involved from the beginning in defining and producing the competencies. In addition, private industry was

informed of the competencies as they developed and had the opportunity to react to the first draft.

Examples of groups of educators who were informed of either a draft of the competencies or of the final product include

a. the state-wide meeting of community college chief academic officers at Kerrville in June, 1989
b. the Texas Association of Developmental teachers at Dallas in October, 1989
c. The state association of reading teachers at San Antonio, also in October, 1989

Scale and intensity of effort and resources called on

The scale of the Instructional Competencies Project is state-wide. Through the colleges and universities, it will affect every student in the state. The effect that it has goes well beyond the testing of students in their freshman year. That is an important issue, but the competencies go far beyond determining students' abilities as measured by paper and pencil instruments. It goes beyond learning facts to critically interpreting them and synthesizing them into original conclusions and insights.

The resources called on included educators from the community colleges and universities, the public schools, and private industry in Texas. In addition, it included consultants from other states and written products of similar projects done in New Jersey and Minnesota. It can count among its contributors members of the Texas Education Agency, private industry, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

E. Project Results

The educators who participated in the project did so at two distinct levels. The first was the level at which the competencies were actually written. At this level participants looked deeply into the questions of student abilities. The whole concept of curriculum was examined, as were the goals of education. The second level of participation was less intense, requiring only an introduction to a finished report, although a very complete one.

The results of the project are of two types, one more difficult to measure than the other. Difficult to evaluate are the internal changes that took place in all the participants, regardless of their degree of involvement with creating the competencies. A proposed series of continuing presentations by the participants to their home institutions is discussed below as an evaluation of the project's results.

More easily evaluated results are the three printed documents that define college-level competencies (Improvement for Undergraduate Education in Texas: College-Level Competencies), the list of resource persons by community college region (Regional Resources), and the compiled notes of the participants in each of the three state-wide meetings devoted solely to presenting the final report of the project (Proceedings of Conferences on "Improvement of Undergraduate Education in Texas: College-Level Competencies").

The purpose of the final report is to clearly define the skills and abilities needed by students in their first year of study toward the baccalaureate. The purpose of the

resource list is to enable practitioners in any part of the state to easily contact participants in the project. And the purpose of the notes is to give its readers an idea of the exchange of ideas and reactions to the report.

Evaluation:

The evaluation of the project is now in the formative stages. The documents listed above are evidence of its fulfillment, and they can be evaluated for their clarity and completeness. In addition, we can count over three hundred participants reached in the three conferences devoted solely to presenting the competencies. Furthermore, a Coordinating Board-appointed committee reviewing transfer and articulation issues in the state has been charged to incorporate the FIPSE Project College-Level Competencies into the Core Curriculum Committee's activities.

At the final conference in Corpus Christi, it was suggested that all participants at all three conferences take it upon themselves to make a formal presentation of the competencies to their own institutions. The level of formality was left up to each person, but in general it was suggested that the presentation be on an agenda and be well organized and well presented. To that end, a letter was sent from the FIPSE Project director to every participant proposing the presentation and promising to keep track of the presenters, the date of the presentation, the institution, and the group addressed. The list will be published at least twice in 1990 in the Coordinating Board's newsletter "Coordinates." The success of this commitment will surely be a measure of the success of the competencies project to affect educators' behavior.

F. Summary and Conclusions

Major insights gained through this project center on the importance of the quality of higher education in Texas. That in itself is hardly an insight of note. The benefit to our state is in realizing how important quality education is to economic well being. At two of the FIPSE conferences, the keynote speakers were members of the business community in Dallas and Corpus Christi. Those speakers emphasized how the organization and presentation on paper of clear thinking is crucial to the success of individuals and the organizations they represent. In other words the educators present for the conferences came to know how closely related their work is to developing and maintaining the economy of the state.

Advice that flows from the Texas experience relates to involving educators from the secondary schools. The process of setting and changing curriculum in the schools was not fully appreciated by the colleges and universities. As a result, participants from the schools attended on an "FYI" basis, but did not see how changes in college level student competencies was of concern to them as classroom teachers, administrators or curriculum specialists.

It would therefore seem wise to seek ways for states to initiate improvements in curriculum, mission statements, student behaviors and the goals and objectives that come out of them at all levels of the educational system.